



TABLE OF CONTENTS

NO	TITLE OF THE PAPER & NAMES OF AUTHOR/S	PAGES
1	The Inviolability of Medical Confidentiality: An Analysis of the Rules and Exceptions <i>Jahn Kassim, P.N. &amp; Ramli, N.</i>	1
2	The Role of Apologies in the Resolution of Medical Disputes <i>Jahn Kassim, P.N. &amp; Saleh, M.R.</i>	21
3	The Concept Of Retributive And Restorative Justice In Islamic Criminal Law – With Comparative Reference To The Practice Of Malaysian Shariah Court <i>Wan Muhammad, R.</i>	42
4	Children As Weapon Of Law: Child Soldiers – A General Overview <i>Musa, M.K. &amp; Md Radzi, M.S.N.</i>	58
5	The Duty Of Good Faith In Common Law: A New View On Contemporary Contract Law <i>Abdullah, N. , Musa, M.K. , &amp; Hanafi, H</i>	77
6	Regulating Charitable Organizations In Malaysia; Issues And Proposals <i>Ali, Z. , Hassan, H. &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	97
7	“Partners’ Limited”, The Changing Facet Of Private Legal Practices Entity In Malaysia And Singapore <i>Abdul Rahman, H.M. , Alias,S.A. , &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	110
8	Transpacific Partnership Agreement And Internet Policing <i>Abdul Ghani Azmi,I.M. , Alavi,R. , Ismail, S.F. &amp; Ismail, M.</i>	130
9	Sustainable Development of the Community via Business Entity; Special reference to the Community Interest Company <i>Md Radzi, M.S.N, Musa, M.K. &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	146
10	Human Rights: Discrimination Against Women in Workforce and Way Forward <i>Seyapalan,P.S.D. , Shakri, A.K &amp; Ramachandran, J.</i>	155
11	Factors Governing Enforcement of Environmental Laws: An Appraisal <i>Ansari, A.H. &amp; Ishan Jan,N.</i>	161
12	Socio Legal Study on Knowledge of Respondents in Malaysia: An Empirical Evidence From the Registration of Cross-Border Marriage <i>Md Said, M.H .,Md Hashim, N. , Abdul Hak, N. , Wok, S . &amp; Che Soh Yusoff, R.</i>	191
13	The Role of Judicial Review in Syariah Criminal Offences Enforcement in Malaysia: An Overview <i>Abdul Rahman, N.</i>	206

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LAW AND  
SOCIETY 2016 (ICLAS V)*

*Fatoni Universiti, Pattani, Thailand*

18 -19 April 2016

14	Apostasy in Malaysia: The Extent of Religious Freedom and Sufficiency of the State Enactments to Curb the Problem <i>Shakri, A.K., Seyapalan, P.S.D., Abdull Manaf, A.W. &amp; Adzmi, P.S.A.</i>	222
15	The Changing Landscape in Assisted Reproductive Technologies: How Malaysia Should Respond <i>Yaakob, H.</i>	229
16	Iddah Maintenance: Mandatory But Often Neglected <i>Asari, K.N. , Makhtar, M., Hamid, N.A, Abdullah Asuhaimi, F. &amp; Pauzai, N.A.</i>	237
17	The Impacts of Income Tax Law Complexity on the Compliance Costs and Behaviour of Corporate Taxpayers <i>Sapiei, N.S., Abdullah, M. &amp; Ismail Nawang, N.</i>	253
18	An Overview on Marriage Reconciliation under the Law Reform (Marriage & Divorce) Act 1976 <i>Sowell, S.A.S</i>	277
19	Perubahan Politik Terengganu 1959-1961 <i>Abdullah, Z., Aziz, H. &amp; A.Ghani. Y.</i>	286
20	Administration of the Deceased's Estate under Section 17 of Public Trust Corporation Act 1995 with Special Reference to Vehicle <i>Drs Nasrul, M.A. &amp; Mohd Salim, W.N.</i>	297
21	The Social Benefit of Equal Opportunity Rule in Takeovers and Mergers of Companies <i>Syed A Rahman, S.F.H. &amp; Ambaras Khan, M.</i>	310
22	The Doctrine of Basic Structure of the Malaysian Constitution: A Study of Framework <i>Hamid, N.A., Ismail Nawang, N., Salleh, K. &amp; Makhtar, M.</i>	335
23	Determining Fundamental Breach in International Sale of Goods: Taming the Unruly Horse? <i>Hamid, A.G., Ishan Jan, M.N. &amp; Abdul Salam, K.</i>	349
24	Facilitating the Division of Matrimonial Asset in Malaysian Shariah Court through Hibah <i>Sahari, N.H. , Mat Zin, N. , Ibrahim, N. &amp; Abdul Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	368
25	Warranties: The Hidden Shield and Sword for the Insurer to Retain Profit under Marine Insurance <i>Ahmad, M.S. &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	382
26	Mind Fatigue: The Jeopardy to Contract of Charterparty under the Carriage of Goods by Sea <i>Ahmad, M.S., &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A.</i>	392

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LAW AND  
SOCIETY 2016 (ICLAS V)*

*Fatoni Universiti, Pattani, Thailand*

18 -19 April 2016

27	Financial Neglect and Children's Right to Education: Issues on the Maintenance of Children After Divorce in Muslim Marriages in Malaysia <i>Makhtar, M. , Asari, K.N. &amp; Abdullah Asuhaimi, F.</i>	400
28	Corporate Social Responsibility from the Shari 'Ah Perspective; The Practices in Bimb and Al-Rajhi Bank <i>Al Hada, B., Abd Ghadas, Z.A. &amp; Abd Aziz, H.</i>	415
29	Human Rights and the United Nations Charter: Transcendence of the International Standards of Human Rights <i>Zakariah, A.A., Azizam, S.H. &amp; Md Tah, I.H.</i>	440
30	The Right of the Spouse of the Non-Muslim Marriage to Matrimonial Property: A Comparative Study Between Malaysian Law and English Law <i>Pauzai, N.A. , Musa, M.K. , Hamid, N.A. &amp; Asari, K.N.</i>	467
31	Penipuan Dalam Urus Niaga Tanah di Malaysia <i>Harun, N. &amp; Hassim, Z.</i>	477
32	The Inconsistency of the Regulations on Divestment Of Shares in Indonesian Mining Sector <i>Putra, A. &amp; Nasrullah</i>	501
33	The Current Development of the Medical Malpractice Law in Indonesia <i>Susila, M.E., Ichsan, M. &amp; Gunawan, Y.</i>	512
34	Gender Fairness, Equality and Analysis Method: A Study on Their Essence and Impact on Islamic Law <i>Ichsan, M.</i>	529
35	The Analysis of Indonesian Intention to Join Trans-Pacific Partnership Based on the Principles of Democratic Economy System <i>Zainal, I.□ &amp; Fitriyanti, F.</i>	549
36	Models of Election of the Head of Regions After the 1998 Political Reform in Realizing Local Democracy in Indonesia <i>Satriawan, I. &amp; Salim, A.</i>	564
37	Strengthening the Political Party in Indonesia Through Funding from the National State Budget <i>Satriawan, I. &amp; Prasajo, B.P.</i>	581
38	Constitutional Democracy and Adjudication: A comparison of Constitutional Adjudication Institutions in Malaysia and Indonesia <i>Satriawan, I., Mokhtar, K.A. &amp; Nur Islami, M.</i>	604
39	The Effectiveness of Dispute Settlement on the Result of Presidential Election 2014 in the Constitutional Court: Case Study in Indonesian Constitutional Court <i>Soni, M.</i>	643

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LAW AND  
SOCIETY 2016 (ICLAS V)*

*Fatoni Universiti, Pattani, Thailand*

18 -19 April 2016

40	The Protection of Children's Rights in Indonesia under Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and Convention on the Rights of the Child: Case of Angeline <i>Aldiansyah, T.A. &amp; Al Ghozali, F.</i>	656
41	The Responsibility of the State on Transboundary Haze Pollution After the Ratification of AATHP: Case of Indonesia <i>Gunawan, Y. &amp; Wahyu, M.A.</i>	670
42	The Protection of Small and Medium Enterprises in Yogyakarta Towards Asean Economic Community Based on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <i>Gunawan, Y. &amp; Endyka, Y.C.</i>	689
43	The International Law Perspective on the Espionage of Australia to Indonesia <i>Negara, Y.S. &amp; Pratiwi, D.A.</i>	706
44	Philanthropy and Social Justice in Waqf Administration in Morocco: Lessons Learnt from the History <i>Mohamad, N.A., Mahmud, F.M. Shahirah, N., Hakimi, I. &amp; Ismail, A.</i>	727
45	Perkahwinan Tidak Mengikut Prosedur: Satu Tinjauan Awal di Mahkamah Syariah Terengganu <i>Mohamad, A., Bidin, A. &amp; Mohamad, M.N.</i>	745
46	"CAIS@LAW" Accounting Information System for Small Law Firms in Malaysia <i>Wan Ismail, W.N. , Ghazali, F. , Abd Ghadas, Z.A. &amp; Abd Rahman, C.A.</i>	761
47	The Concept of Shakhshiyah l'itbariyah and Its Application in Corporation <i>Abd Ghadas, Z.A. &amp; Abd Aziz, H.</i>	771
48	Application of Waqf Property as A Financial Instrument for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) in Nigeria <i>Amuda, Y.J. &amp; Md Yusof, N.</i>	795
49	The Regulation of Equity Crowdfunding in Malaysia <i>Hingun, M. &amp; Mohd Sulaiman, A.N.</i>	807
50	Protection of Child Labour: The International Instruments and Domestic Laws of Malaysia <i>Ali Mohamed, A.A., Nik Mahmood, N.A.K., Mohd, A., Jelili, Y. &amp; Marhanum</i>	817
51	Cryptocurrency: To Regulate Or Not to Regulate? <i>Zulhuda, S. &amp; Sayuti, A.</i>	836
52	ME-C APP: Enhancing Legal Knowledge Via Smartphone <i>Haron, A.S., Abd Ghadas, Z.A., Salleh, M.A. &amp; Mohamed, A.M.H.</i>	854



*PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LAW AND  
SOCIETY 2016 (ICLAS V)*

*Fatoni Universiti, Pattani, Thailand*

18 -19 April 2016

53	Adakah Yang Baharu dalam Kajian 'Keselamatan Insan' di Asia Tenggara? <i>Mat, B., Othman, Z., &amp; Omar, M.K.</i>	866
54	Amalan Hisbah di Bahagian Penguatkuasaan Jabatan Agama Islam Negeri-Negeri: Tinjauan Terhadap Peranan Pegawai-Pegawai Penguatkuasa Agama <i>Badarulzaman, M.H.</i>	895
55	An Analysis of the Consensus Ad Idem Principle; The Shari'ah and Malaysia Contract Law Perspectives <i>Nik Mahmod, N.A.K, Abd. Ghani Azmi, I.M., Abd. Ghadas, Z.A., Mohd. Sulaiman, A.N., Engku Ali, E.R.A., Wan Ismail, W.A.F., Mohd Napiah, M.D. &amp; Daud, M.</i>	912
56	Community Mediation in Malaysia: Training and Accreditation of Mediators in Comparison with SCMC and IIAM <i>Hanna Ambaras Khan, H. &amp; Abdul Hak, N.</i>	930
57	Dealing with Facts in Judicial Process: A Reflection of Ijtihadic Practice <i>Awang, M.B. , Ibrahim, B., Wan Muhammad, R., Abas, A. &amp; Mohd Yusob, M.L.</i>	945
58	Film Rating in Malaysia and Bangladesh <i>Shuaib, F.S. &amp; Islam, M.Z.</i>	965
59	Highlights on the Flaws in Land Administration in Malaysia: A Review <i>Salleh, K. , Harun, N. &amp; Bidin, A.</i>	974
60	International Religious Freedom Act 1998 and the Issues of Religious Freedom in Muslim Countries <i>Mohd Yusob, M.L., Salleh, M.A., Mohd Ariffin, R.A. &amp; Mohamad, A.M.H.</i>	994
61	Kanak-Kanak Tidak Terkawal Di Mahkamah Bagi Kanak-Kanak Di Malaysia <i>Syed Nong Mohamad, S.N.A. &amp; Mohd Yusoff, J. Z.</i>	1012
62	Kelemahan Dalam Pentadbiran Tanah Di Malaysia: Satu Sorotan <i>Salleh, K. , Harun, N., &amp; Bidin, A.</i>	1026
63	Mediation Services at the Family Courts of Singapore And Australia: Lessons For Malaysia <i>Mohd Arshad, A.H, Che Soh @ Yusoff, R Mohd Zin, N. &amp; Abdul Hak, N.</i>	1048
64	Private Individual Waqf: An Analysis <i>Md Yusof, N., Abd Kadir, N.A., Amuda, Y.J.</i>	1063
65	Misconduct and Disciplinary Action: Proportionality of Punishment with Reference to Industrial Court Awards	1071

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE 5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LAW AND  
SOCIETY 2016 (ICLAS V)*

*Fatoni Universiti, Pattani, Thailand*

18 -19 April 2016

	<i>Ali Mohamed, A.A. &amp; Sardar Baig, F.B.</i>	
66	Potential Liability of Universities in Providing Internet Access to Students under the Malaysian Law <i>Ismail Nawang, N ., Hamid, N.A. &amp; Zakariah, A.A.</i>	1087
67	Determinant of Mahathir's Foreign Policy Towards Palestine Conflict <i>Mohamed, A.M.H. , Haron, A.S. , Salleh, M.A. &amp; Ahmed, A.A.</i>	1094
68	Kematian dalam Tahanan Polis dan Usaha ke Arah Menanganinya di Malaysia: Satu Tinjauan <i>Ab. Kadir , N.A., Bidin, A., Salleh, K. &amp; Harun, N.</i>	1103
69	Refugee Crises In Southeast Asia: Malaysian Experience <i>Ahmad, A.A., Abdul Rahim, Z. &amp; Mohamed, A.M.H .</i>	1117
70	Remedies for Victims of Abuse Among the Elderly under Islamic Family Law in Malaysia <i>Bidin, A., Salleh, K. &amp; Mohd, Z.</i>	1138
71	Shareholders Activism and Shareholders Power to Instruct <i>Mohd Sulaiman, A.N. &amp; Hassan, H.</i>	1151
72	The Application of Shari'ah Principles of ADR in Malaysia Construction Industry <i>Abd Ghadas, Z.A., Mohamad, A.M.T., Abdullah Suhaimi, F. &amp; Mohd Zafian, R.</i>	1166
73	The Emerging Critiques Towards the Conception of Directors' Duties <i>Ab Rahman, H.M. &amp; Salleh, K.</i>	1188
74	The Influence of Ulū al-albāb in Social Accounting for Community-Interest Corporations <i>Mohd Sarif , S., Ismail, Y. &amp; Abd Ghadas, Z.A. &amp; Md.Radzi, M.S.N</i>	1211
75	Zakat: Antara Pembayaran Melalui Institusi & Individu <i>Md Yusof, N. &amp; Ab Kadir, N.A.</i>	1225
76	Shari'ah Issues in Al-Ijarah Thumma Al-Bay' (AITAB) Car Financing as Practiced in Malaysia <i>Othman, A.A., Salman, M.J., Haitham Mohamed Ali, H. &amp; Musa, M.K.</i>	1241
77	Application of Tawarruq in Islamic Personal Financing: Shari'ah Issues <i>Othman, A.A., Haitham Mohamed Ali, H., Salman, M.J., &amp; Musa, M.K.</i>	1263

FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

**SOCIO LEGAL STUDY ON KNOWLEDGE OF RESPONDENTS IN  
MALAYSIA: AN EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE REGISTRATION  
OF CROSS-BORDER MARRIAGE**

*Md Said, M.H<sup>1</sup>, Md Hashim, N.<sup>2</sup>, Abdul Hak, N.<sup>3</sup>, Wok, S<sup>4</sup>. & Che Soh Yusoff, R.<sup>5</sup>*

**Abstract**

Cross-border marriage is a marriage without the permission from the marriage registrar in each state and the solemnisation is either contracted in Malaysia or outside Malaysia. This type of marriage violates the purpose of marriage which is to obtain peace and tranquillity. The purpose of this study is to examine and analyse the level of knowledge among the respondents towards the registration of cross-border marriage among Muslims in Malaysia. The sample consists of 400 respondents from four regions in Malaysia. Questionnaire survey was the main data collection method employed in this study and further supported by semi structured interview. Based on the findings, the respondents are already aware of the opportunity to register the marriage at the court. Despite their acknowledgement, new regulation and policy to control cross-border marriage should be implemented in order to curb the issue from worsening in the future.

**Keywords:** cross border marriage, knowledge, registration, court

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

## 1. Introduction

Islam is a complete and comprehensive religion covering each and every aspect of human life. In order to strengthen the family institution, Islam has set up the perfect guidelines and rules to ensure the welfare and harmony state of a family. In legal perspective, Islamic law has detailed out the rules and regulations regarding marriages to protect its sanctity. The Shariah law that is practiced in Malaysia recognizes a lawful marriage as abiding to the pillars of marriage in Islam and complies with the requirements set out in the legal provisions enforced in each state in the country. Marriage is one of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (*p.b.u.h*), but it has been violated to accomplish one's wishes and desires; such as to get married without the families' permission or because the female is already pregnant out of wedlock. Each of these 'wishes and desires' have led to new types of marriage contracts. One of these emerged contracts is eloping with future partners or popularly known among the Malaysians as *kahwin lari*. It may also be termed as cross-border marriage. Cross-border marriage is defined as a marriage without the consent of the authority such as the Islamic Religious Department in each state and the Syariah Court Judges (Noraini, 2012, 100). Cross-border marriage has raised many issues and major problems for Malaysian mainly among the Muslims and Malays, particularly in matters related to marriage registration.

### 1.1. Research Methodology

This article uses both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. A survey was conducted in selected states in Malaysia representing four regions namely the Northern, Central, East and South regions of Malaysia. Questionnaire was used to collect the data from 400 respondents. Semi structured interview was also conducted with the informants who have the knowledge and experience in cross-border marriage. The collected data were analysed using SPSS version 22.

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Islamic Law Perspective

In Islam, cross-border marriage is not specifically mentioned. However the matter raises certain issues regarding the righteous guardian of the bride. Allah has mentioned in the Quran that a widow is entitled to choose a man if she wants to get married upon the completion of her *'iddah* period. Allah says;

If any of you die and leave widows behind, they shall wait concerning themselves for four months and ten days. When they have fulfilled their term, there is no blame on you if they dispose themselves in a just and reasonable manner. And Allah is well acquainted with what you do (Al Baqarah: 234).

There are a few hadith that narrate on the issue of guardianship in marriage;

Sufyan reported on the basis of the same chain of transmitters (and the right words are):

A woman who has been previously married (thayyib) has more right to her person than her guardian and the virgin father must ask her consent being her silence. At times he said: her silence is her affirmation (Imam Muslim, Sahih Muslim translated by Abdul Hamid, 1999).

‘A’ishah reported the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) as saying: The marriage of a woman who marries without the consent of her guardians is void. (He said these words three times). If there is cohabitation, she gets her dower for the intercourse her husband has had. If there is a dispute, the sultan is the guardian of one who has none (Sunan Abu Dawud translated by Ahmad Hasan, 1984).

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

### *1.2.2 Malaysian Legal Perspective*

According to Section 19 of Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984, no marriage shall be solemnised without the permission to marry—

- (a) by the Registrar under Section 17 or by the Syariah Judge under Section 18, where the marriage involves a female resident in the Federal Territory; or
- (b) by the proper authority of a State, where the marriage involves a female resident in that State.

From this section, we can conclude that any marriage that was carried out without the permission of the marriage registrar will be charged and punished. The punishment is based on the Section 40(2) of Islamic Family Law Act (Federal Territories) 1984 which allocates fine of not more than one thousand Ringgit Malaysia and imprisonment of not more than 6 month or both for the misconduct.

According to Section 31(1) of the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act 1984, any person who is a resident of the Federal Territory has contracted a valid marriage according to Hukum Syarak abroad and not being in a marriage registered under the Section 24, the person shall, within six months after the date of the marriage, appear before the nearest or most conveniently available Registrar of Muslim Marriages, Divorces, and Ruju' abroad in order to register the marriage. The marriage, upon being registered, shall be deemed to be registered under this Act.

The 52<sup>nd</sup> Conference of the Fatwa Committee of the National Council of Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia held on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2002, had discussed issues pertaining cross-border marriage in Southern Thailand. The Committee had decided that marriage outside of the country is valid provided that;

- a) the marriage fulfils the essential validity of a marriage,
- b) the distance is more than two *marhalahs*, there is no court decision preventing the woman from getting married on legal reason and,

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

c) such a marriage is solemnised by a *wali* that has been vested by the law in the country.

Thus, Fatwa Committee of the National Council of Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia still consider such marriage as valid in Malaysia context, given the location exceeds two *marhalahs* and fulfils all conditions that have been prescribed by the laws and rulings.

In identifying issues related to Cross Border Marriages, a number of previous studies were used as reference by the researcher. However, this discussion will only focus on a few main writings related to the identification of potential literature reviews. To date, existing literatures on socio legal studies regarding cross border marriage are deemed as limited.

Noraini Md Hashim (2009) in her research entitled “Registration of Marriage in Malaysia: A Socio-Legal Study of Runaway Marriages among Muslims” has dealt specifically on cross border marriage by analysing the demographics profiles of those involved with cross border marriage. However, the data utilised in her research were only obtained through the applicants’ files in court and religious offices.

Raihanah (2007) in her writing “Polygamy without the Shariah Court’s Permission in Malaysia: A Socio-Legal Perspective” also covered the polygamy issue. She blamed the strict procedure in practicing polygamy has caused Muslim couples to commit cross border marriage. By employing the inferential statistical technique, the study tried to prove polygamy’s capability as the predictor of cross border marriage.

Cheng, Brenda, Rashidah (2012) in their writing claimed that foreigners especially the Indonesians often marry the Muslims in Malaysia in order to secure their economic positions and upgrade their social status. The authors interviewed both the Malaysian and Indonesian who are involved with such international marriages. However, their study did not conduct any quantitative research for data analysis purpose. Thus, the current study is believed to fill the gap by using quantitative research method in analysing the data

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

## **1.4 Research Objective**

The specific aim of this research is to examine and analyse the differences between demographic information and respondents' knowledge towards cross-border marriage.

## **2. Findings**

### **2.1 Descriptive Analysis**

Table 1.1 illustrates the respondents' knowledge regarding the registration process of cross marriage in court. Overall, 79.5% of the respondents acknowledge the marriage registration at the court. Specifically, more than three-quarters of the respondents (77.6%) know that many Muslim married couples registered their marriage. 78.2% of the respondents know that it is compulsory to register marriage for all Muslim couples and 78.7% of the respondents know that the court gives an appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples. In term of perquisites, 79.9% of the respondents know that the court gives appropriate benefits to all Muslim couples. Majority of the respondents (80.8%) know that the court gives appropriate judgement to the children involved in such marriage and majority of the respondents (80.2%) deem registering the marriage will make the involved family to become happier. From the data in Table 5.8, it is apparent that the court puts much emphasis on the children's welfare as well as the family itself.

79.5% of the respondents perceive Muslim couples who registered their marriage as adequately literate on the current law enforcement. Moreover, 78.1% of the respondents perceive Muslim couples who registered their marriage as abiding the law. In fact, majority of the respondents (82.6%) know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to register their marriage. From the religion context, 79.5% of the respondents perceive those who registered their marriage are obedient to the religion.

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

Table 1.1: Respondents' Knowledge on Marriage Registration at the Court

No.	Knowledge towards Marriage	Level of Agreement					Mean*	SD	%
		1	2	3	4	5			
1	I know many Muslim married couples registered their marriage.	-	0.5	25.0	60.8	13.8	3.878	0.627	77.6
2	I know that it is compulsory to register marriage for all Muslim couples.	-	0.3	24.8	58.8	16.3	3.910	0.643	78.2
3	I know that the court gives appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples.	-	0.5	22.3	60.5	16.8	3.935	0.638	78.7
4	I know that the court gives appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples.	-	0.5	18.5	62.0	19.0	3.995	0.629	79.9
5	I know that the court gives appropriate judgement to the children involved.	-	1.0	17.0	59.3	22.8	4.038	0.661	80.8
6	I feel that by registering the marriage, the family will be happier.	-	0.5	21.3	55.0	23.3	4.010	0.683	80.2
7	I perceive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage know the law.	-	1.0	27.8	44.0	27.3	3.975	0.769	79.5
8	I perceive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage are those who								
9	I know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to								
10	I perceive that those Muslim couples who registered their marriage are								
	<b>Total</b>						<b>3.974</b>	<b>0.478</b>	<b>79.5</b>

\*1=strongly disagree (1-20%), 2=disagree (21-40%), 3=somewhat agree (41-60%), 4=agree (61-

80%), 5= strongly agree (81-100%)



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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

## 2.2 Inferential Analysis

There are ten items in respondents' knowledge that were analysed using the independent t-Test. The variable is tested according to the demographic information of the respondents. The purpose of the analysis is to differentiate between demographic information and respondents' knowledge regarding the registration process of cross-border marriage at court.

For the independent t-test, respondents' knowledge towards registration of cross-border marriage at court was tested according to gender (male-female), locality (rural-urban), and type of marriage (polygamy-monogamy) dichotomy.

### *2.2.1 Independent T-Test for Respondents' Knowledge towards Registration of Cross Border Marriage at Court by Gender*

Table 1.2 shows the t-test results of respondents' knowledge by gender, in which no significant differences were found in the items. Overall, there are no significant differences between male and female in terms of respondents' attitudes towards marriage registration at court, given the result for male respondents was (M=3.986, SD=0.488) and the result for the female respondents was (M=3.960, SD=0.467). Direct comparison between these two gender classes found that male respondents' knowledge is slightly higher than female respondents in terms of acknowledging the registration process of the marriage at court. For overall gender, the t statistic value is 0.538 at 398 degrees of freedom and p value of .591.

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18 – 19 APRIL 2016

Table 1.2: Independent t-Test for Respondents' Knowledge by Gender

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	SD		df	p
I know many Muslim married couples registered their marriage	Male	220	3.886	0.634			
	Female	180	3.867	0.619			
I know that it is compulsory to register marriage for all Muslim couples	Male	220	3.909	0.642			
	Female	180	3.911	0.645			
I know that the court gives an appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples.	Male	220	3.923	0.640			
	Female	180	3.950	0.637			
I know that the court gives an appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples.	Male	220	4.027	0.626			
	Female	180	3.956	0.633			
I know that the court gives an appropriate judgement to the children	Male	220	4.073	0.651			
	Female	180	3.994	0.673	1.179	398	.239
I feel that by registering the marriage, the family will be happier.	Male	220	4.041	0.685			
	Female	180	3.972	0.680			
I believe that Muslim couples who registered their marriage know the law.	Male	220	3.986	0.767			
	Female	180	3.961	0.772	0.327	398	.744
I believe that Muslim couples who registered their marriage are those who	Male	220	3.932	0.734			
	Female	180	3.867	0.758	0.870	398	.385
I know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to register their marriage.	Male	220	4.109	0.757			
	Female	180	4.150	0.744	-0.542	398	.588
I perceive that those Muslim couples who registered their marriage are obedient to the religion.	Male	220	3.973	0.715			
					0.007	398	.994
Overall knowledge of the respondents	Male	220	3.986	0.488			
	Female						

### 2.2.2 Independent T-Test for Knowledge of Respondents towards Registration of Marriage at Court by Locality

Data were further analysed on the differences of respondents' attitudes (Table 1.3) in terms of locality (rural and urban). The number of respondents in the rural area was 118 whereas the respondents in urban area were 282. Within the items, there are two significant items. The first item which is the respondents' perception towards the couples who registered their marriages as abiding the law was found as significant at ( $t=2.144$ ,  $p=.033$ ), while the second item which is the respondents' perception of those Muslim couples who registered their marriage as obedient to the religion was

FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

also found significant at ( $t=1.969$ ,  $p=.050$ ). In addition, the urban residences are found to be better informed than the rural people.

In overall, the mean value for the rural area respondents in rural area is 3.953 while the mean value for the respondents in urban area is 3.983. Meanwhile, the standard deviation for rural group is 0.425 and for urban group is 0.499. In this case, the  $t$  statistic is 0.564 at 398 degrees of freedom. The independent test  $p$ -value is .573 which is greater than .05. Thus, it shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the respondents in rural and urban areas in term of knowledge towards marriage registration at court even though the mean value for urban area is higher than that of the rural area.

Table 1.3: Independent t-Test for Respondents' Knowledge by Locality

Variable	Residence	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
I know many Muslim married couples registered their marriage.	Urban	282	3.894	0.605			
	Rural	118	3.840	0.679			
I know that it is compulsory to register marriage for all Muslim couples.	Urban	282	3.911	0.622			
	Rural	118	3.907	0.692			
I know that the court gives an appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples.	Urban	282	3.904	0.644			
	Rural	118	4.010	0.620			
I know that the court gives an appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples.	Urban	282	3.965	0.653			
	Rural	118	4.068	0.566			
I perceive that the court gives an appropriate judgement to the children	Urban	282	4.007	0.696	-1.424	398	.155
	Rural	118	4.110	0.567			
I feel that by registering the marriage, the family will be happier.	Urban	282	4.004	0.703			
	Rural	118	4.025	0.633			
I perceive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage know the	Urban	282	4.014	0.773	1.579	398	.115
	Rural	118	3.881	0.753			
I perceive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage are those	Urban	282	3.954	0.751	2.144	398	.033
	Rural	118	3.780	0.718			
I know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to register their marriage.	Urban	282	4.160	0.754	1.323	398	.186
	Rural	118	4.051	0.738			
I perceive that those Muslim couples who registered their marriage are obedient to the religion.	Urban	282	4.018	0.738	1.969	398	.050
	Rural	118	3.953	0.425			
Overall knowledge of the respondents towards marriage registration at court	Urban	282	3.983	0.499			
	Rural	118	3.953	0.425			

FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

### *2.2.3 Independent t-Test for Knowledge of Respondents towards Registration of Marriage at Court by Type of Marriage*

Table 1.4 shows the results of the independent t-test on the respondents' knowledge according to type of marriages, in which four items show statistically significant differences. Firstly, the respondents know that the court provides appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples. ( $t=-3.214$ ,  $p=.001$ ). For monogamous marriage, the mean is 3.832 and the standard deviation is 0.670. While the mean for polygamous marriage is 4.034 and the standard deviation is 0.590. The figures illustrate the lesser knowledge towards registration of cross-border marriage among respondents who practise monogamous marriage compared to those in polygamous marriage. Secondly, the respondents know that the court gives appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples ( $t=-2.042$ ,  $p=.017$ ). The mean value for respondents in monogamous marriage is 3.918 and the standard deviation is 0.602. Meanwhile, the mean value for those in polygamous marriage is 4.069 and the standard deviation is 0.647. From the figure, it can be concluded that the respondents who practise monogamous marriage are having less knowledge in regards to the benefits of registering cross-border marriage compared to respondents involved in polygamous marriage. Thirdly, the respondents know that the court gives appropriate judgement to the children involved in such marriage ( $t=-2.489$ ,  $p=.013$ ). The mean value for monogamous marriage 3.954 and the standard deviation is 0.651, while the mean value for polygamous marriage is 4.118 and the standard deviation is 0.663. With this, it shows that the respondents who practise monogamous marriage are less knowledgeable in terms of the appropriate judgement to the children involved with cross border marriage compared to respondents who practise polygamous marriage. Fourthly, it is found that the respondents know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to register their marriage ( $t=-2.142$ ,  $p=.033$ ). The mean value for monogamous marriage is 4.046 and the standard deviation is 0.767. Comparatively, the mean value for polygamous marriage is 4.206 and the standard deviation is 0.727, indicating respondents in monogamous marriage are having less knowledge with regards to the encouragement by the Malaysian Authorities for Muslim couples

FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

to register their marriage as compared to the respondents in polygamous marriage. In overall, there is significant difference between the respondents in monogamous marriage ( $M=3.921$ ,  $SD=0.496$ ) and polygamous marriage ( $M=4.025$ ,  $SD=0.456$ ) in terms of respondents' knowledge on marriage registration at court with t-statistic value at -2.175 and p of .030 which is less than .05 acceptance threshold.

Table 1.4: Independent t-Test for Respondents' knowledge by Type of Marriages

	Type of						
know many Muslim married couples registered their marriage.	Monogamy	196	3.827	0.616			
	Polygamy	204	3.927	0.635			
at it is compulsory to register marriage for all Muslim couples.	Monogamy	196	3.883	0.617			
	Polygamy	204	3.936	0.666			
know that the court gives an appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples.	Monogamy	196	3.832	0.670			
	Polygamy	204	4.034	0.590			
that the court gives an appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples.	Monogamy	196	3.918	0.602			
	Polygamy	204	4.069	0.647			
now that the court gives an appropriate judgement to the	Monogamy	196	3.954	0.651	-2.489	398	.013
	Polygamy	204	4.118	0.663			
feel that by registering the marriage, the family will be happier.	Monogamy	196	3.980	0.687			
	Polygamy	204	4.040	0.679			
ive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage know	Monogamy	196	3.959	0.743	-0.403	398	.687
	Polygamy	204	3.990	0.794			
rceive that Muslim couples who registered their marriage are	Monogamy	196	3.837	0.760	-1.736	398	.083
	Polygamy	204	3.966	0.725			
I know that the authorities in Malaysia strongly encourage Muslim couples to register their marriage.	Monogamy	196	4.046	0.767	-2.142	398	.033
	Polygamy	204	4.206	0.727			
I perceive that those Muslim couples who registered their marriage are obedient to the religion..	Monogamy	196	3.980	0.709	0.195	398	.846
Overall knowledge of the respondents	Monogamy	196	3.921	0.496			
	Polygamy	204	4.025	0.456			

FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

### 3. Discussion

With regards to the differences between demographic information and the respondents' knowledge on cross-border marriage registration, there are several differences that can be listed. Generally, it is found that majority of the respondents agree with the overall knowledge towards marriage registration at the court. However, according to the independent t-test, respondents' knowledge towards the registration of the cross-border marriage according to gender shows that female respondents are less knowledgeable than the male respondents in terms of the overall knowledge on marriage registration even though it is not statistically significant. The imbalance knowledge spread illustrates, the female respondents generally receive less information than the male respondents in terms of marriage registration. Furthermore, when a male informant from Johor was asked regarding his decision to opt for cross border marriage, he answered;

....This marriage must be registered, if this marriage is  
unregistered, our life will be affected.... (Personal  
Communication with Informant No.1, on 23 October 2014,  
Songkhla)

The study also discovers statistically significant difference between the urban and rural residents in terms of perception on Muslim couples who registered their marriage are those who abide to the law. Therefore, this study recommends for wider circulation of the information on the importance of marriage registration especially among the community in the rural areas.

This study also finds that respondents who practice polygamous marriage receive more knowledge compared to those who practice monogamous cross-border marriage, either in terms of knowing that the court provides appropriate judgement to all Muslim couples or in regard to the knowledge that the court gives appropriate benefit to all Muslim couples.



FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

#### 4. Conclusion

Several recommendations can be suggested to curb this phenomenon as it affects the family institution. The recommendations are as follow;

1. Government agency such as the Legal Aid Department and Religious Office must have a one stop center or branch in every district as reference for the people in the rural area without having to travel to town.
2. To better promote the importance of marriage registration through mosque or seminar especially in rural area;
3. The government should amend the laws regarding cross-border marriage;
4. Legal education must be instilled since in school hood.

In conclusion, it has become a general knowledge that some previous studies show that the legal factors play an important roles in cross-border marriage. However, in this study, we discover that the respondents' knowledge also plays an important factor in committing cross-border marriage. Therefore, it is proposed that more research must be done in order to prevent the cross-border marriage as it affects the family institution especially the future of the women and children involved.

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FATONI UNIVERSITY, PATTANI, THAILAND  
18 – 19 APRIL 2016

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